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SUBJECT: LOW TURNOUT EXPECTED FOR JULY 1 MARCH DESPITE
ANSON CHAN'S PARTICIPATION

REF: A. 03 HONG KONG 2489

- [1B.](#) 04 HONG KONG 4029
- [1C.](#) 05 HONG KONG 5374
- [1D.](#) HONG KONG 2638
- [1E.](#) HONG KONG 2003
- [1F.](#) 05 HONG KONG 3167

Classified By: E/P Section Chief Simon Schuchat; Reasons 1.4 (b, d)

[11.](#) (C) Summary: Organizers expect only 30,000 to 40,000 people to participate in this year's July 1 pro-democracy march in Hong Kong, despite the high-profile participation of popular former Chief Secretary Anson Chan. Nevertheless, the organizers hope that by placing less emphasis on other social issues, as they did last year, and focusing on the core theme of universal suffrage, turnout will be higher than last year's disappointing 21,000. Whatever the turnout, it will be far below 2003's half a million marchers or the 300,000 of [12004](#). People's aspirations for democracy have not waned, but average Hong Kongers, pragmatic as always, may feel some sense of futility about democratization following last year's failure to achieve either gradual constitutional reform of the electoral system or a timetable for the introduction of universal suffrage. Other factors, such as a robust economy, a popular Chief Executive, and the lack of an immediate issue, also may encourage a lower turnout. A pro-Beijing parade and carnival, where organizers are offering a free seafood lunch and other benefits, could attract more people than the pro-democracy march. End Summary.

Back to Basics

[12.](#) (C) After a disappointing turnout of only 21,000 people at last year's pro-democracy July 1 rally, in which organizers tried to increase attendance by promoting a diffuse set of social issues ranging from gay and lesbian rights to a minimum wage, this year the same organizers are attempting to return the rally's focus to the core theme of universal suffrage. Some democracy activists were uncomfortable with last year's diverse approach, which they criticized as more like a "carnival" than a solemn march for universal suffrage. While organizers have once again invited a broad range of organizations and activists to participate -- the catch-all slogan for this year's march will be "A New Hong Kong, With Equality and Justice" -- they are hoping that those who are primarily interested in promoting democracy will return in force this year. Civil Human Rights Front (CHRF) member and march organizer Jackie Hung told us on June 29 that she expects 30,000 to 40,000 people to participate, though many independent observers believe the total will be closer to 20,000, especially given the forecast for scattered

thunderstorms on July 1.

¶3. (SBU) Whatever the turnout, it seems certain to be far below the 500,000-plus of 2003 or the 300,000 of 2004. In 2003, a volatile mix of economic downturn, SARS, and Article 23 national security legislation stoked the anger that precipitated a massive and unexpected turnout for the rally (ref a). In 2004, continuing frustration with Tung's ineffective governance and the National People's Congress Standing Committee's interpretation that ruled out universal suffrage for the 2007 and 2008 elections led to higher-than-expected participation (ref b). Those events have now given way to a feel-good atmosphere in Hong Kong where the economy is buoyant and the Chief Executive's public approval rating is 63 percent -- factors not conducive to mobilizing mass protest marches.

¶4. (C) Furthermore, the pro-democracy movement is currently at a low ebb following its failure last year to secure either constitutional reform of the electoral system or a timetable for the introduction of universal suffrage. An editorial in the "South China Morning Post" on June 28 captured the mood among many when it lamented that "As the next possible opportunity to implement universal suffrage is six years away, it is hardly surprising that a feeling of remoteness, indifference and futility has eroded the 'can-do' spirit of July 1." Nevertheless, Hong Kongers have shown repeatedly that they will take to the streets in large numbers to push for universal suffrage if there is an immediate and convincing cause. The surprisingly large turnout (about 100,000) for a pro-democracy rally in December 2005 (ref c), just as the Legislative Council was preparing to vote on the Government's plan for electoral reform, was a clear demonstration that popular desire for democracy is alive and well.

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A Smorgasbord of July 1 Events

¶5. (SBU) July 1 events begin with a formal flag raising ceremony at 8:00 am at the Wanchai waterfront, with admission by invitation only. Next, there will be a pro-Beijing "patriotic" parade from the Hong Kong Stadium to the Southorn Playground in Wanchai, followed by a carnival at the playground, starting at 10:30 am. Finally, the pro-democracy march from Victoria Park to the Central Government Offices will start at 3:00 pm. The patriotic parade and carnival, organized by the Federation of Trade Unions and the Chinese General Chamber of Commerce, are expected to attract about 30,000 people, possibly exceeding the turnout for the pro-democracy march. Soldiers from the People's Liberation Army will reportedly march in the parade, which organizers hope will help boost the turnout. Organizers are also offering a free seafood lunch and discount tours of Hong Kong landmarks as an enticement for people to attend the parade and carnival. The Bank of China (Hong Kong) is reportedly giving its staff HK\$100 (US\$13) in cash and gifts if they attend the parade. Feeling the competition, organizers of the pro-democracy march have emphasized that there is no reason why people can't attend the parade in the morning, eat a free lunch, and then march for democracy in the afternoon.

The Anson Chan Show

¶6. (C) Organizers of the march are publicly welcoming former Chief Secretary Anson Chan's high profile announcement one week in advance that she will participate (ref d), though some worry privately that she may hijack the rally to advance her own political ambitions. Chan's decision to march, and her calls for Hong Kongers to join her have been front page news in Hong Kong all week. Chan fueled the press frenzy by announcing on June 27 that she would talk to the media every day in the run-up to the rally. Speaking on a radio show on

June 28, Chan advised Chief Executive Donald Tsang to "show more courage in pushing for greater democracy." She also blamed Beijing for the lack of progress, saying "In the early stage of reunification, the central government had indeed implemented the promises made under the Basic Law. But there have been a number of impediments in recent years, resulting in a loss of people's confidence in the central government." Political commentator Chris Yeung wrote in the South China Morning Post on June 28 that Chan is actually taking a huge political risk by being so out-front in calling for Hong Kongers to march on July 1. Yeung wrote, "A lackluster turnout on Saturday could deal a severe blow to Mrs. Chan's popularity and the democratic movement." Despite the media's attention on Chan, organizers are downplaying her significance for the rally. Jackie Hung predicted to us that Chan's participation was unlikely to significantly affect the turnout, though she admitted that it has increased the public's interest in the rally. A survey published by the independent "Ming Pao" newspaper on June 30 found that 6.3 percent of likely participants in the pro-democracy rally were doing so due to Chan's participation.

Chinese Dissidents to March

¶7. (C) Chinese dissident scholar Yu Jie will reportedly march as well. Yu, who met with President Bush at the White House in May, arrived in Hong Kong on June 28 from Beijing and had no problems getting through Hong Kong immigration despite media reports last month that he was banned from entering Hong Kong (ref e). Yu was accompanied by fellow dissident Zhang Qianjin, who said that the pair had received a phone call before leaving Beijing instructing them to keep a low profile in Hong Kong. Yu said he would march wearing a t-shirt with a photo of jailed mainland civil rights activist Chen Guangcheng. While in Hong Kong, Yu also plans to meet with Szeto Wah, Chairman of the Hong Kong Alliance in Support of Patriotic Democratic Movements in China, a group labeled "subversive" by Beijing, and Reverend Chu Yiu-ming, a democracy activist.

Catholic Turnout

¶8. (C) Catholics may return in larger numbers this year following an apparent boycott last year due to the selection of a homosexual rights group to lead the march. In 2005, Christian groups objected to the participation of gay rights

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activists and did not actively mobilize their members as they had in previous rallies (ref f). Gay rights groups will not lead this year (though they will participate) and the issue has not been mentioned in the press. Hung said that Cardinal Zen, who played a key role in mobilizing extensive Catholic participation in the 2003 and 2004 marches, would lead a prayer service in Victoria Park prior to the march as he has in past years. In 2005, Zen said publicly that he would not urge Catholics to march -- a statement that seemed almost designed to discourage participation. Zen has remained silent this year, neither encouraging nor discouraging participation.

Cunningham